

**Board of Veterans Services  
Education Working Group**

**DRAFT**

**Meeting Minutes  
January 4, 2019**

A meeting of the Education Working Group of the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) was held on Friday, January 4, 2019 via conference call.

**Members Present**

- Carl Bess
- Paige Cherry
- Michael Dick, Chair
- Nick Kesler
- Tammi Lambert
- Carrie Ann Alford, DVS Administrative support

The Agenda for the meeting was:

1. Discussion of resource material
2. Identification of additional resources, organizations, etc.
3. Initial identification of key questions/issues
4. Discussion of plan for "listen and learn" visits to selected schools
5. Adjournment

Chairman Michael Dick began the meeting at 12:00p. Present at the beginning of the call were: Mr. Bess, Mr. Dick, Mr. Kesler, Ms. Lambert and Ms. Alford. Mr. Cherry joined the call later.

Mr. Dick began the call by stating that some of the materials sent out to the group were provided by Ms. Lambert and he found them very useful.

Mr. Bess stated concern about the focus of their mission as there is so much information. Mr. Dick agreed he thought Ms. Lambert's highlighting of the Challenges to Student Veterans document was helpful.

Mr. Kesler said he, as a former student veteran and his wife just finished school as well, felt that the school administration was the most frustrating piece to deal with for student veterans. He asked what the state can mandate and DVS able to do to tackle this issue. Ms. Lambert agreed and asked "what can we legally hold [schools] to? What can we mandate?"

Mr. Dick said they can focus on assessing and making recommendations to the DVS and the General Assembly – maybe recommendations for laws for state schools. He asked Ms. Alford for clarification.

Ms. Alford said that the recommendations would be for the state agency that regulates higher education – SCHEV (State Council for Higher Education in Virginia) but that it was possible for the working group to make recommendations to another agency other than DVS. She said that Ms. Lambert asked a great question – what can they do legally – and that they should keep that in mind as they do their research and assessments. She said the focus should also be on something concrete – like school administration that they can make recommendations for improvements or changes. She asked Mr. Kesler if he had specific issues with the school administration that he could list out?

He said accreditation issues were a top problem – delays in filing the benefits paperwork by the school delayed payments and that caused financial hardships to the student veterans with tuition but also rent and other expenses. Then vets drop to part-time status which affects their benefits and it becomes a cycle.

Ms. Lambert asked if it was possible to prove that those issues were the result of the schools and not the VA, given all the recent media attention about late payments from the VA for GI Bill benefits.

Mr. Dick said the group should assess what the “good” schools do and if that can be replicated at all schools.

Ms. Lambert stated that she thought the “listen and learn tour” with Student Veterans of America (SVA) was an important part – to learn what the SVs are dealing with.

Mr. Kesler asked how the group can be proactive and for the state to be an advocate? They need to collect the data to make accurate recommendations. And to understand how to talk to SVs about other programs like training programs, certifications and other opportunities that are not 4-year schools. How do we get that information out to veterans?

Ms. Lambert said she would love to get information from SVA as they had a large meeting recently and should have lots of information. What do they think the group should focus on? Gap Coverage? Alignment of policy agreements?

Mr. Dick brought it back to data – and finding the areas that can be quantified – create categories to lean into and ask students what they think of what their school is doing in these categories. What are the “good” schools doing? What are the perceptions?

Ms. Alford said they should set up a presentation like the entrepreneurship working group did. She described for new board members, Mr. Bess and Ms. Lambert what that group had done and what it entailed. They did research on best practices and created a presentation and used that as the starting point for the discussion and asked people – do you agree with our direction? You have to control the conversation and figure out where you want to go with recommendations and then find out if there is support. Otherwise, you will end up with 1,000 opinions and it could devolve into a grumbling session among the SVs. She said to focus on school structures and systems – these are things that SCHEV and the legislature can work on.

Ms. Lambert said there are DOD and VA policy agreements that do all these things just mentioned, she said no school in Virginia have put these policies into place and maybe that was part of the problem.

Mr. Dick asked him to share the survey questions with him and for everyone to work on a presentation on what they would like to see presented and submit their drafts to him. He would work on putting together survey questions. He asked about setting up school visits.

Mr. Cherry said he would be willing to help set up a visit in Tidewater since he lived in the area. Mr. Dick also said he was willing to set something up to visit the schools. Members who are able can join but not everyone needs to attend every visitation as it is probably impossible to find dates that work for everyone. He suggested visiting each region – Tidewater Community College (TCC) in Hampton Roads and possibly ODU since it is close by. VCU and VSU in Richmond/Central Virginia, George Mason in NOVA and Tech and Liberty in Southwest.

Ms. Alford also gave background on the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) program that was put into place in 2016 by then-Delegate Scott Taylor. It was based on a JLC priority for vet centers with a full time dedicated employee to be at each VCCS campus. The General Assembly and Governor McAuliffe narrowed that down to the 7 schools with the highest veteran population. TCC is the most advanced and loves giving tours. She said they should work with Assistant Secretary Leslie Frazier to set up a tour and talk to the staff. She said Delegate Kathy Tran was looking into patroning a bill to take that concept up to all the 4 year schools and she would follow up with the board if that bill was filed.

Mr. Kesler gave more background on the entrepreneurship working group (he was chairman of the group) and everything the members did in terms of research and setting up meetings and creating a survey and getting it out in to the field and obtaining enough responses for there to be statistically viable data. They compared that data to published data and compared it to other states. He said timing would be of the essence with schools as finals are in April and May and graduations are in May then students are gone for the summer.

Ms. Alford recommended they work with Lauren Augustine, IAVA rep to the JLC and Senior VP of Government Relations for SVA. Instead of big groups, have her help find the student veteran leaders at each campus they will visit and give them enough lead time to help collect information and then the working group sits down with 5-6 student leaders at each site.

Mr. Dick asked Ms. Alford about a state board looking at Liberty University. She said it was fine as long as they understood it is not comparable to state schools – as a private and religious school they have different funding streams. However, Liberty has aggressively gone after online education, military learners – creating systems for active duty deployed members to still be in class while deployed. Then they do targeted outreach once those people leave the military and tell them to come back and get another degree with their GI Bill. They have an active military support office and it would be worthwhile to visit.

Mr. Cherry mentioned Hampton University, which is in Hampton Roads as well. Ms. Alford agreed that getting a few of the HBCUs like Hampton and VSU involved was a good idea.

Mr. Dick said if there were no objections the nominated schools to visit are:

Tidewater Community College (TCC) [Hampton Roads]

Old Dominion University (ODU) [Hampton Roads]

Hampton University [Hampton Roads]

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) [Central]

Virginia State University (VSU) [Central]

George Mason University (GMU) [NOVA]

Virginia Tech [SWVA]

Liberty University [SWVA]

Mr. Dick asked Ms. Alford some housekeeping questions about Session and then with no further objections, the meeting was adjourned at 12:56 p.m.